



Representative Mark Ericks 2006 Session-Wrap

Spring 2006



Dear Friends,

As hospitable and beautiful as Olympia is, I'm glad to be home again and with great news for you. A lot of things happened in this short, intense and historic session.

I can safely say we obtained a string of victories in all our priority issues and then some: we improved health care, strengthened our education system, increased access to higher education, supported large and small businesses, toughened laws for sex offenders, meth cooks and identity thieves, and we're also saving almost \$1 billion dollars to insulate the state budget against future cost increases.

And for the second time in state history we adjourned one day early! Our joint, bipartisan efforts paid off and I am very pleased with all the goals we met this year for the people of Washington. Inside this newsletter you'll find information on some of these accomplishments, I hope you find it useful.

I encourage you to contact me with your comments and ideas because they help me voice your concerns. It has been a pleasure serving as your state representative this biennium, and I look forward to continuing that service to you.

Sincerely,

Mark Ericks
State Representative
1st Legislative District

**Representative
Mark Ericks**

1st. Legislative District
332 John L. O'Brien Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7900

E-mail:
ericks.mark@leg.wa.gov

Web Page:
[http://hdc.leg.wa.gov/
members/ericks/](http://hdc.leg.wa.gov/members/ericks/)

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Saving for the future

Our budget puts away over \$941 million in savings, that's a very accurate example of fiscal restraint. In writing this session's supplemental budget we limited most investments to crucial demands in education, health care, environment and economic development programs.

The money we're saving will be available for a rainy day and to pay off future costs, including our state's pension system.

This budget builds on the Priorities of Government budgeting process from last year, with the aim of increasing government accountability. I'm confident this budget will help create stability for years to come.

Supporting businesses by lowering taxes

The Legislature approved more than \$50 million in tax incentives to improve the business climate in the state and help create additional jobs. We also created a bipartisan commission to examine more than 400 tax preferences to determine if their continuation still serves the public interest.

- Broadened two aerospace tax incentives to include companies engaged in research, design and engineering of airplanes and reduced the B&O tax rate for aviation repair services. This will help protect jobs in our district.
- Extended the temporary B&O tax reduction to help the aluminum industry.
- Tax benefits for timber cutting and forest product manufacturing
- Moved the monthly due date for business excise taxes from the 20th to the 25th day and cut late payment penalties.
- Raised the small business personal-property tax exemption from \$3,000 to \$15,000.

Giving job-development a push and a LIFT

Local governments need economic tools to attract and retain job-creating industries. I co-sponsored a bill that creates a new way for cities and counties to promote job creation and economic development: the Local Infrastructure Financing Tool (LIFT).

Local governments will be able to build infrastructure, such as water lines and roads, by issuing bonds based on future tax revenue. Washington State joined the other 49 states with a form of this tool when the Legislature passed the LIFT bill.

With this modern financing idea, local governments and communities will draw in new businesses and help existing ones expand.



Reforming Unemployment Insurance



We passed an historic and balanced compromise on unemployment insurance reform that lets workers get better benefits and employers get a system that is affordable and sustainable.

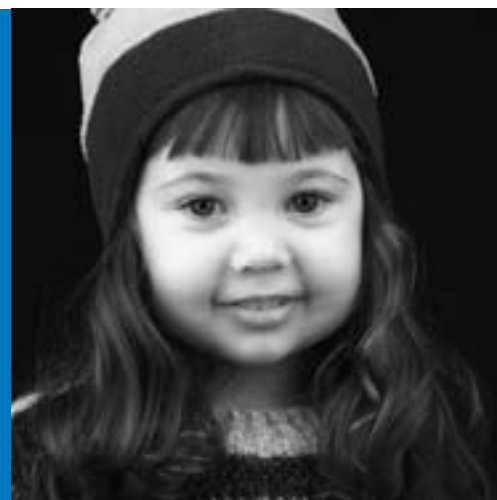
The new measure restores balance to the unemployment insurance system, after drastic cuts to benefits – especially for our construction and agricultural workers – were made in 2003.

This is a remarkable compromise – it is good for business, because it will save millions each year; and it's good for workers whose lives are turned upside down when their jobs end through no fault of their own.

Insuring every kid

In 1994, Washington State expanded eligibility for health care coverage for low-income children. By August 2005, we were covering a half-million children in low-income working families. But as health care costs continue to rise, more and more employers are dropping family coverage for their employees. This leaves thousands of kids without coverage every year.

Last session we made the commitment to give basic health care coverage to all the children of Washington by 2010 and we budgeted 73,000 enrollments. This session, in the supplemental budget, we added another 7,000, so we're looking at having an additional 80,000 low-income children in state health programs by the end of the biennium.



Protecting our kids

The public asked for stronger sex offender laws and we responded this session with measures endorsed by the Washington State Prosecutors Association, the Washington State Police Sheriffs and Chiefs, and the Washington Council of Police and Sheriffs.

The 18 Senate and House bills that make the bipartisan, comprehensive package of sex offender measures, passed by the Legislature this year, are specifically designed to catch and convict sex offenders.

The new laws require 25-year minimum sentences for serious sex offenses against children younger than 15, plus added electronic monitoring requirements.

The safety and well-being of Washington's children has always been one of my top priorities. With over 30 years of law enforcement experience, I've seen first-hand the horror and the trauma that sexually abused children go through and I'll never tire of working to get the perpetrators locked-up.



I co-sponsored all the House bills in the package and worked closely with legislators on both sides of the aisle to come up with the best possible laws, the ones that will put criminals in prison.

The first thing law-enforcement officials need to make an arrest and get a conviction is to get the victims to speak up, which at times can be a challenge.

Our new laws will encourage victims to report these crimes, which will result in more sex offenders behind bars.



Reaching historic compromise on liability-reform

Last November, voters rejected both ballot measures, I-330, advanced by the insurance industry, and I-336, by trial lawyers. This session, through a bipartisan effort, we finally found a way to resolve the contentious issue of medical malpractice. Our solution is not just for doctors and it's not just for lawyers. It is for all the people in Washington State.

The new policy agreement honors patient safety, by reducing medical errors, and insurance reform, by lowering premiums for doctors. It also reforms our civil liability system by penalizing frivolous lawsuits.



Taking the path to graduation

Parents and kids are concerned about the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) and with reason. Time and time again studies revealed that something needed to be done to help students in our schools reach their graduation goals.

As part of the state's plan to give students a fair chance to earn their high school diploma, the legislature funded voluntary retakes this year for 11th-grade students.

We also passed tutoring and summer school programs, and we're giving students four alternative options to show they meet standards if they do not pass the WASL on their second attempt. The goal is to be fair to students who don't do well on standardized tests, but can prove they know the material.

Providing more training for the real world

Increasing access to higher education throughout the state will ensure that more Washingtonians get the tools they need to compete for—and get—good jobs.

This session, Snohomish, Island, and Skagit Counties will gain new four-year degree programs in a partnership between two- and four-year colleges centered on the Everett Community College campus.

This year we also opened 500 new slots for students in high-demand fields like nursing and engineering, and we funded Opportunity Grants for 400 low-income students.

Other new laws

This session there were 2,204 bills introduced, but only 391 passed the Legislature. I sponsored over 200 bills this year; here are some of the ones I prime sponsored that have been signed into law by Governor Gregoire:

HB 1966 – ID Theft

This measure ensures severe punishment for people that steal someone else's identity with fraudulent motives.

ID theft is the fastest growing crime in America: 246,570 people filed identity theft complaints with the Federal Trade Commission nationwide in 2004. Washington State had over 5,500 ID theft complaints in the same year, which placed our state in the top ten identity theft sites per capita.

This law makes ID theft a "crime against persons," which means that convicts can't clear their records, they can be subject to community placements or community custody, and they cannot qualify for up to 50% earned release time for good conduct.

HB 2415 – Ethel's law

I sponsored this consumer protection bill in honor of Ethel Adams, who was caught in a tragic multi-vehicle collision last year and was denied payment by her insurer on the grounds that the crash had been deliberate, even though the driver at fault had nothing to do with Ethel.

After excessive media coverage and the involvement of the State Insurance Commissioner, the insurer finally paid up. But this sort of thing should have never happened and this new law makes sure it never happens in our state again.

The law views an accident from the perspective of the insured, defining the term "accident" as an unexpected and unintended occurrence by the insured person.

HB 2715 – Interoperability Executive Committee

This law requires the State Interoperability Executive Committee to coordinate purchasing of all state wireless radio communications systems for public safety to make sure they comply with the required standard, Project 25.

P-25 is a standard supported and used by state and federal governments and the communications industry, and will allow the various public safety wireless radio systems to communicate with each other efficiently.

HB 2759 – Transfer of real property

This law helps about 200 non-profit Developmental Disabilities service providers stay in business by allowing public entities to transfer property to them.

Many of these organizations operate in buildings under affordable long-term leases that are about to expire and they don't have the means to pay market rents.

Under this new law, public entities may transfer or renew the leases of these properties to the non-profits, in exchange for their promise to continue providing services for individuals with sensory, physical, or mental disabilities.



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Representative Mark Ericks • 1st Legislative District

Representative
Mark Ericks
1st. Legislative District
332 John L. O'Brien Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600